

ZONING TO PRESERVE SMALL BUSINESS ACTIVITY IN MID-CAMBRIDGE

COMMUNITY DISCUSSION – MARCH 8, 2007

■ *Issue*

Mid-Cambridge Neighborhood Study Update (2004):

Land Use Recommendation #9: The City should work to protect existing small businesses and promote new small businesses within Mid-Cambridge.

This might be accomplished through zoning or design guidelines (especially of locations with desirable non-conforming uses on Broadway and Cambridge Streets). Some areas that could be considered for this type of zoning would be the Skenderian Apothecary site and the former Savenours site. The City should look for additional appropriate locations.

■ *Considerations*

Existing non-conforming businesses are OK. Small business uses have been thriving in the residential districts of Mid-Cambridge and other neighborhoods of the city for a long time.

A variance from the zoning regulations would be required for:

- Expansion of a non-conforming business
- Change from a non-conforming business to another type of commercial use
- Redevelopment of a site and re-establishment of a non-conforming business
- Creation of a new non-conforming business where it doesn't already exist

Zoning isn't the only factor in preserving business activity. Business owners and property owners make their own decisions on whether to buy, sell, change, or redevelop, and their choices are influenced by many factors, including the private market and personal considerations.

■ *Direct Support for Local Businesses*

(see brochure *Doing Business in Cambridge* for information on City programs)

■ *Possible Zoning Approaches*

- No change; rely on variance process
- Allow re-establishment, change of use, or expansion by special permit with specific criteria (in place of variance)
- Create special zoning districts (base districts or overlays) where limited retail is allowed, with use and design criteria
- Rezone areas to business districts

■ *Questions for Discussion*

- **What are the specific concerns we want to address?**
 - Preserving the existing businesses?
 - Helping the retail environment transition, adapt, improve?
 - Encouraging new businesses?
- **What are the different impacts businesses might have on different neighbors?**
- **What are the “pros and cons” of different zoning options?**
- **What is the best way to move forward?**